

7-027 1966 International Gypsy
Office Meeting Letter

Greenways
Knockholt
near Sevenoaks
Kent

October 13th., 1966

Dear Ruby *Loren!*

We have just been over to France to stay with Vanko Rouda and other members of the Gypsy movement on the Continent.

I was able to tell them something about the situation of travelling people in the North of Ireland but I wish that you had been there to speak for them.

There is great progress being made by the International Gypsy Committee and on Sunday last we attended a meeting at which all the different Gypsies groups were represented - Rom, Manouch and Gitane. Juan Fernandez, President of the Gypsy Association of France told us that the French Government is considering giving money for setting up official camps.

Vanko Rouda said that the Gypsy people now have many friends in the United Nations and that within a year or two the United Nations will take up the cause of travelling people, pressing governments in every country to get on with the job of providing sites and other improvements. And the rights and status of Gypsies, as a separate people, will be recognised.

In France, the movement has the advantage of being led by well-educated Gypsy people. Outsiders do not take part in the Gypsy Association's work. It is running entirely by Gypsies and travellers.

On Saturday we were accepted into Vanko's family when we became God parents of his baby son Manuel at a ceremony in Paris, according to Romani tradition.

You would have felt very happy to hear so much Romanes being spoken. I still understand only a few words but I'm learning quickly. We were at Stevo Demeter's house in Paris where his sons and daughters speak only Romanes in the home.

We went to a camp outside Paris where 2,000 Gypsies are living in huts they have built. When we arrived the police were in the camp while bulldozers were knocking down some of the huts. We argued with the police officer in charge and then went to the Romany Evangelical Church nearby and came back with Stevo Demeter and other church leaders to stop the eviction. The police said they were only taking down huts that were not occupied. The families are now demanding another camp and the Gypsy Association is supporting them.

Juan Fernandez and Vanko Rouda very much want you to get the people together in Northern Ireland and form an association to represent travelling people. Have you been in touch with Miss Bessie Manonachie, the M.P. who promised to speak for travellers in the Northern Ireland parliament? Her address is 24 Derryvolgie Avenue, Belfast 9. Why not go and see her and find out if she is pressing the case. What about Bobby Bingham, secretary of the Assissi Fellowship, who you met at the meetings. He can be found at Bryson House, 23 Bedford Street.

We are determined to start an association in Britain, beginning in the London area. We have a small committee already with Jasper Smith, Soli Brown, Joe Cooper and others and we are arranging a big meeting in London soon to bring in a lot of travellers from the North side of the city.

I keep writing to you because I believed everything you said about the need for Gypsies to represent themselves and I know that even if you are not writing - and I don't know why - you will be glad to have information about what Gypsies are doing in France and down here in the South of England.

One day, people are going to wake up and find that the Gypsy people have organised themselves as the Negroes have in America and are demanding their rights. And those rights are going to be supported by the United Nations. That is what we're working for.

I know that if you or Isaac could come over for a time to France, as you are being invited to by Vanko Rouda, you would feel differently. You would feel proud of what has been done and what can be done. Gypsy leaders are accepted because they say what is in everyone's hearts - that we cannot go on being pushed about and badly treated.

Vanko wants you - your whole family - to go over to France next summer as his guests. You can put your trailer somewhere in Belfast for a few weeks, pack up and come down to Kent with a van and a tent and stay in the lane where we are for a night or two. And then when we get over to France, Vanko will see that we are driven down to this great mansion that the Gypsy people have bought where there will be room for everybody. The plan is to hold a big gathering there.

You can hardly imagine it, but there were over 5,000 Gypsies staying in trailers and tents in the grounds of this mansion last month. That gives you some idea of how big the place is and how well organised our people are in France.

I've had two letters from Arthur and Margaret Gentle and they still have their yard at Lurgan.

Send us a post-card so we know you are still ALIVE !